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*courage is contagious*

## Viewing cable 08BOGOTA902, PARAMILITARY DEMOBILIZATION CREATES GREATER

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### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#08BOGOTA902**.

| Reference ID | Created          | Released         | Classification | Origin         |
|--------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|
| 08BOGOTA902  | 2008-03-06 21:07 | 2011-08-30 01:44 | CONFIDENTIAL   | Embassy Bogota |

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.semana.com/wikileaks/Seccion/168.aspx>

VZCZCXYZ0088  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBO #0902/01 0662107  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 062107Z MAR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1811  
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 8076  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0059  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAR 9285  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 5984  
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 1353  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 6636  
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 4321

id: 144638  
date: 3/6/2008 21:07  
refid: 08BOGOTA902  
origin: Embassy Bogota  
classification: CONFIDENTIAL  
destination:  
header:  
VZCZCXYZ0088  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBO #0902/01 0662107

ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 062107Z MAR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1811  
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 8076  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0059  
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RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 6636  
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 4321

----- header ends -----

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 000902

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/06/2018

TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: PARAMILITARY DEMOBILIZATION CREATES GREATER  
POLITICAL SPACE IN MEDIO MAGDALENA REGION, BUT SECURITY  
CHALLENGES REMAIN

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer.

Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (C) Local civic and Catholic church leaders said the paramilitary demobilization and parapolitical investigations created new political space in the Medio Magdalena region, noting the triumph of reformist mayors in southern Bolivar department and Barrancabermeja in the October local elections. Still, they cautioned that the security situation remains in flux, with the FARC, some former paramilitaries, and narcotraffickers cooperating on specific drug deals and resisting efforts to promote economic alternatives to coca. Local leaders advocate a stronger GOC civilian presence in rural areas, especially in southern Bolivar, as well as better coordination between eradication and alternative development programs. A local military commander conceded many peasants continue to view the Army with suspicion, but said the military is making an effort to improve relations with rural residents. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Polcouns visited Barrancabermeja in the Medio Magdalena (MM) region on February 13 and met with local military commanders, human rights and development groups, and union leaders. The Medio Magdalena region consists of 30,000 square kilometers surrounding the central Magdalena river, and includes parts of four departments--western Northern Santander, western Santander, southern Bolivar, and Eastern Antioquia. Medio Magdalena has 800,000 inhabitants -- roughly 40% of whom live in rural areas.

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NEW POLITICAL SPACE  
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¶3. (C) Father De Roux, a Jesuit priest and head of the Peace and Development Program in Medio-Magdalena (PDPMM), said the paramilitary demobilization--coupled with the parapolitical investigations--created new political space in the region, leading to greater participation in the October local elections and the defeat of many candidates affiliated with the former paramilitaries. He said the victories of Carlos Contreras and Jose Zendale in the Barrancabermeja and Santa Rosa del Sur mayoral races were especially significant. Contreras comes out of the regional peace process movement, and is committed to combating public corruption through implementation of transparent, participatory budget

practices. Zendale, whose campaign manager was killed a week after the election, campaigned against local narcotraffickers and corruption. De Roux said both will need technical and political support to overcome an entrenched system of kickbacks, clientism, and narco penetration of public institutions.

¶4. (C) Local OAS Mission in Support of the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP/OAS) XXXXXXXXXXXX agreed the exception to the overall trend toward greater political openness in the MM is the area around Puerto Berrio and Puerto Boyaca. Paramilitary groups established control over this region in the early 1980s, and their political allies continue to dominate local politics. Lopez said the region's para-affiliation is literally "written on the wall" -- a billboard outside the city of Puerto Boyaca proclaims it "The Anti-subversive Capital of Colombia." XXXXXXXXXXXX said the MAPP/OAS may propose that the billboard be removed to symbolize political change, but recognizes that a substantial part of the local population views the billboard with pride.

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SECURITY CONDITIONS  
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¶5. (C) De Roux and Lopez said MM is both a coca growing and transshipment route, attracting the "big leagues" of organized crime such as the FARC, demobilized paramilitary leaders who have returned to crime such as Miguel and Victor Mejia ("los Mellizos"), and remnants of the Wilber Varela narcotrafficking group. The result is continuing instability, particularly in Southern Bolivar. Lt. Col. Ivan Herrera, commander of the Nueva Granada Battalion which

operates in Bolivar, said despite their supposed ideological differences, the various criminal groups cooperate on specific drug shipments and deals. Local peasant leader Miguel Daza--a strong proponent of alternative development in Santa Rosa del Sur in Bolivar--was murdered on February 16. Santa Rosa Mayor Zendale blamed the murder on a FARC alliance with local narcotraffickers. De Roux said the FARC has declared it will tax peasants in the region even if they abandon coca cultivation for alternative crops.

¶6. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX the Union Sindical Obrero (USO) which represents petroleum workers (largely employees of state-owned Ecopetrol), noted some advances in the protection of union leaders and members. Still, he said from 1989-1999, 80 USO members were killed, and 33 were detained on spurious criminal charges. He claimed the GOC continues to try to link the USO to the ELN, alleging the military use "false" intelligence reports to jail union members on rebellion charges. XXXXXXXXXXXX opposes the FTA, but appreciated USG efforts to tie it to strengthening union freedoms. He said the unions recognize the importance of "internationalizing" labor issues. XXXXXXXXXXXX added that Ecopetrol's outsourcing of jobs to subcontractors poses a major challenge to USO, as does privatization. The local USO affiliate has 1180 members who work for Ecopetrol in Barrancabermeja, plus 220 employed by subcontractors.

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COUNTERNARCOTICS IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT  
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¶7. (C) De Roux noted the need to combine eradication efforts with alternative development projects for peasants. Current manual and spray eradication is implemented with no effort to explain to peasants what comes next. He noted that the Minister of Agriculture prefers large, agribusiness projects, when what is needed is technical assistance and credit programs for small producers growing cacao and African palm. Herrera said eradication is necessary to reduce the finances of illegal groups, but added that it generates recruits for the FARC and other criminal bands. He said the GOC's Accion Social is trying to strengthen local civilian institutions

and to promote economic alternatives to coca, but added that the agency's efforts are in an incipient stage. Lopez noted that to some extent, PDPMM's development programs fill the gap left by GOC civilian agencies. PDPMM receives funding from the European Union, USAID, the GOC, and other donors.

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MILITARY AND CIVILIAN RELATIONSHIP  
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¶8. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX complained that security forces do not recognize the realities that peasants face. In many areas, peasant leaders are not FARC supporters, but must deal with local FARC commanders to survive. The military frequently believes all peasant organizations are tied to the FARC, leading to harassment and arrest of peaceful community leaders. For example, XXXXXXXXXXXX asserted that 12 leaders of the Peasant Association of Cimitarra Valley charged with rebellion, including six detained by authorities, are innocent. He added that narcotraffickers' corruption of police and military officials in the region, especially in the Santa Rosa area, also remains a serious problem. Still, XXXXXXXXXXXX said an increased GOC military presence in the area is key to providing the security needed for economic and democratic development.

¶9. (C) Herrera conceded that many peasants still view the Army as the "enemy." In the past, soldiers mistreated peasants, engaging in petty theft and viewing them as "guerrillas." These tensions are exacerbated by some human rights groups that exaggerate military abuses. Still, Herrera said the military has mounted a major effort to improve relations with the local residents. He had participated in the UN High Commission on Human Rights' visits to the regions to review extrajudicial killings case-by-case with military commanders. Herrera said the visits were positive, and helped the military to institute better controls to address this issue. He stressed that his unit makes an effort to ensure that the Prosecutor General's Technical Investigative Corps (CTI) investigates the scene of all combat deaths. Asked about the detention of the Cimitarra peasant leaders, he said the military has evidence

of their ties to the FARC, but stressed that the civilian justice system would determine their guilt or innocence.  
Brownfield

=====CABLE ENDS=====